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Some Letters of John Gibson

[The following letters of John Gibson are not published, we believe, in any existing sketch of him. They were written in September, 1812, when Gibson was Acting-Governor of the Indiana Territory. War with England had been declared the previous June, the frontier of the northwest had become involved, Fort Harrison on the Wabash, commanded by Captain Zachary Taylor (afterward President Taylor) had been invested by a formidable body of Indians, and these official fragments show Gibson's prompt steps in the exigency. Copies of the letters were found among the papers of the late William Wesley Woollen.]

THE day after the Indian attack on Fort Harrison (Sept. 4, 1812), and before the news of it reached Governor Gibson, he had written "To the officer commanding the quota of militia of Kentucky destined for Vincennes" requesting that Kentucky troops, conformable to the orders of Governor Harrison, be sent as expeditiously as possible to Vincennes. This was in anticipation of Indian troubles. Brigadier General J. Winlock, commanding the forces at Louisville, replied to the letter stating that one of the regiments called for had been taken "on toward Fort Wayne by Governor Harrison," and that he lacked the necessary equipage for the remainder of his troops, there being but 300 muskets, 200 pounds of powder, 20 camp kettles and 300 flints for upward of six hundred men. Having no public money at his command he found great difficulty in supplying the deficiency, but hoped to be able to march by Sept. 10.

Before the latter date Gibson, then apprised of the Fort Harrison investment, wrote again, as follows:

Vincennes, September 9th 1812.

SIR:—On the 4th inst. I wrote you requesting the immediate march of the troops destined for this place, and on the following day I sent a verbal message by Lieut. Whitlock requesting you to have all your heavy baggage under the charge of a guard and proceed with all possible dispatch to this place, as the Indians have invested Fort Harrison and commenced an attack on the frontiers. It is indispensably necessary that no time should be lost in your march hither, as there can be but little or no danger between this and Louisville, except from small skulking parties.

If your baggage should in the least retard your march leave it to come on under a safeguard, and proceed yourself with the troops under your command with all the speed you can.

Yours,

JOHN GIBSON,
Acting Governor.

On the twentieth of September General Winlock wrote from his encampment on "White River, 16 miles from Vincennes," that he would be at Vincennes on Tuesday, at 12 o'clock with 640 men, and that some 600 more, mounted, would be with him the next day; for which force he wished some provision would be made.

At the same time he wrote to General Winlock Gibson dispatched the following letter to General Samuel Hopkins, "or the officer commanding the militia of Henderson County, Kentucky."

Vincennes, September 9th, 1812.

SIR:—The Indians have invested Fort Harrison, and have attacked the frontiers of one of the counties and killed upward of twelve persons. From the number of hostile Indians within the reach of the frontiers of this and the adjacent territory, a general attack is greatly to be apprehended. But a small force has yet arrived from the State of Kentucky, and the thinness of our population and the extent of our frontiers render it difficult if not impossible, to raise such a force here as is necessary to protect our settlements. Under the circumstances we must look to volunteers from Kentucky for assistance. The exigency is such as to preclude the possibility of applying for aid from your quarter through the proper channel. But if there are any in your county or the settlements adjacent to it, who are disposed to volunteer I do not believe that the Governor of the State of Kentucky would object to it. May I therefore ask the favor of you to use your best endeavors to raise as many volunteers as can be conveniently obtained. I shall apprise the Governor of Kentucky of this application.

I am respectfully, Sir, your obt. servt.,

JOHN GIBSON,
Acting Governor.

In response to this Col. Philip Barbour, commanding the 6th regiment of Kentucky volunteers, dispatched to Gibson 241 men under Major William R. McGary, "armed as well as the nature of the case would admit of." Arms and ammunition for this force were secured by impressment, and the balance of the regiment was promised as soon as equipment was supplied.

The following letter is to Col. William Russel, of the United States army:

Vincennes, September 16, 1812.

SIR:—Yesterday at 4 o'clock in the afternoon a Sergt.(?) of Capt. Taylor's company arrived here express from Ft. Harrison, who informed us that he had left the fort on the 13 inst. in the night. I also rec'd two letters from Capt. Taylor. He informs me that after a severe attack made on him by the Indians, which lasted seven hours, he was still able to maintain his garrison. It will be unnecessary to give you the particulars of the Captain's Letters, as I expect before this reaches you you will have seen him. I expect to load in a few days a number of wagons with flour and whiskey. These with 25 beeves for the garrison will start immediately. Major McGary who arrived here yesterday with 240 men of Col. Barbour's Regt. of Ky. Militia will take command of the escort which goes with the provisions and cattle destined for Ft. Harrison. The escort will consist of thirty mounted riflemen and one hundred infantry. I have directed the Major to proceed with the utmost precaution to Ft. Harrison; that, should he meet you on the way or at Ft. Harrison, he is to obey any orders you may please to give him. I rec'd a letter from General Winlock dated at Louisville Sept. 12. He informs us that he would march with all possible speed to this place. The Ranger who brought the letter informs me that General Winlock on the 13th was two miles on this side Jeffersonville. Major McGary informs me that one thousand mounted horsemen from Kentucky would rendezvous at Red Bank on Sunday next, and were to proceed to this place under the command of General Hopkins, and that the remainder of Col. Barbour's regt. would also march to this place as soon as they receive arms, which were hourly expected to arrive at that place. I am in great hopes before you

receive this you will have entered Ft. Harrison and been able to clear your way to that place.

I enclose a number of letters which I rec'd by mail and by 2 rangers which I sent express to Gov'r. Edwards and to you.

I have the honor to be very respectfully your humble svt.

JNO. GIBSON,

Acting Governor.

One other letter among these MSS., dated a few days previous, and addressed to Col. Robert Robertson, concerns the protection of the Clark County frontier.

On the 12th of September 1812, Governor Gibson addressed Colonel Robertson, as follows:

Vincennes, September 12, 1812.

SIR:—If the company ordered from your regiments should not have marched to this place, you will immediately order that company or some other to the frontier of Clark County to act in conjunction with one ordered from Harrison County. I shall leave it to your own discretion to dispose of the men to the best advantage, taking care to have an eye to Linley's settlement and the Drift Wood and Pigeon Roost Settlements. Should there be no person authorized in your county by the Contractor to furnish provisions you will please have them furnished and they will be paid for at the contract price.

You will give particular orders to the officers commanding to employ their men continually in reconnoitering and scouring through the country or the frontier and should anything extraordinary or alarming occur, you will give me the earliest information thereof by express.

I am respectfully your obt. servt.,

JNO. GIBSON,

Acting Governor.